



TECHNOLOGY

High-tech armrests try to make movie theaters more fun



Internal Machine's interactive theatre trivia game armrest.

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(3/11/04) — Going to movie theaters to just see films? Think again. Some companies are trying to make the time before and during the film more fun.

"We replace all of the boring slideshows that you see in regular theaters with interactive entertainment," said CEO of Internal Machine Industries Brandon Hudgeons. "In some cases it's definitely more fun than the movie."

Austin based startup [Internal Machine Industries](#) offers a virtual pre-movie game show they call Question Authority. The movie audience uses a colorful, button filled arm-rests at their seats to play movie trivia games. Players can choose from such brain teasing categories like 80's teen movies, war films and chick flicks. The player with the most correct answers wins prizes like free popcorn, movie passes or bike rentals.

Sometime in 2004, this technology will be ready for movie goers at the [Alamo Drafthouse Movie Theater](#) in West Oaks Mall. The company says audience members will eventually be able to play the theaters next door as well as the company's Austin theaters. Since the Drafthouse already serves food, the controllers will also let you order food - without even having to get out of your chair.

"It's just like hitting a service button on an airplane and someone will come out and take your order," said Hudgeons. "We've got a beer button and so you can hit the button and they'll bring another one right out to your seat."

Austin audiences have enjoyed the gaming system for a while and think they've found a pre-film blockbuster, in some cases actually making them want to come early.

"If they're not really into the movie they can fall back and say at least we had fun before

the movie," said Austin movie goer Mike Guzman.

Not to be out done, other theaters in Houston have already wired themselves for the future.

The Edwards Marq*e at I-10 and Silber now plays live and taped non-movie programming on their slower nights. That's included concerts from rock bands Linkin Park, Korn, and Houston's own Beyonce Knowles.

Besides concerts, the theater also shows educational programs for schools with an interactive twist. Houston students were able to have a discussion with director James Cameron before watching his "Ghosts of the Abyss" film.

The system also shows video shorts before the coming attractions start. It's all thanks to satellite technology being introduced to movie theaters owned by [Regal Cinema](#).

Why the sudden jump beyond traditional films? With DVD's and gaming systems invading our homes, theaters have to compete to fill the seats. It's been reported that the industry as a whole saw a drop in attendance in 2003, but theater's feel they will survive. It's the same fight they faced with the introduction of the VHS tape in the 1980's.

"People have always predicted the end of the movie cinema and it just hasn't happened," said Hudgeons.

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